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PP RUEHIK RUEHLN RUEHPOD RUEHVK RUEHYG

DE RUEHMO #2629/01 2470646

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 030646Z SEP 08

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9806

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002629

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [AM](#) [GG](#) [TU](#) [UZ](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA CAMPAIGNS FOR INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT ON GEORGIA

REF: MOSCOW 2618

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Russia's President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister fanned out in an effort to gain support for the Russian decision to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Medvedev met with Armenian President Sargsyan in Sochi on September 2, while Putin went to Uzbekistan and Lavrov to Turkey. The meetings with the Armenians and Uzbeks come just days before the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) September 5 meeting in Moscow, where Russia hopes to gain the support of the organization for its actions in Georgia. This event took on even greater importance after Russia failed to get the support of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) during its August 28 summit (reftel). While neither Medvedev nor Putin said whether they expected Armenia or Uzbekistan's support, official statements suggested that Russia could link enhanced economic ties with this issue. Lavrov, meanwhile, went to Turkey to discuss Ankara's proposal for a Caucasus stability organization and to possibly force a split in NATO on how to handle Russia. End summary.

Russia Looks Ahead to CSTO Meeting

¶2. (U) Russian President Medvedev said on September 2 that he expected the members of the CSTO to reach a consensus position on the situation in Georgia during their September 5 meeting in Moscow. Speaking following a meeting in Sochi with Sargsyan, Medvedev did not say whether he thought the CSTO would back Russian military action in Georgia or its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian media reported, however, that CSTO Secretary General Bordyuzha said that the organization would support Russia. Meanwhile, MFA spokesman Nesterenko said that the foreign ministers of CSTO member-states would "analyze" the situation in South Ossetia during a preliminary meeting on September 4.

Medvedev and Putin to "Brief" Leaders on Georgia

¶3. (U) Official statements on Medvedev and Putin's meetings with the Armenians and Uzbeks said the Russians would "brief" their counterparts on Russia's position on Georgia. The statements went on to explain at length the nature of Armenian and Uzbek trade relations with Russia, seemingly linking the health of political and economic relations and suggesting that the reward for support of Russia's position could mean closer economic ties.

¶4. (U) Putin went to Tashkent to meet Uzbek President Karimov and PM Mirziyoyev on September 2. Traveling with a business delegation that included Lukoil chief Vagit Alekperov and Gazprom chairman Alexei Miller, Putin ostensibly went to discuss bilateral ties, but said he would take the opportunity to discuss Russia's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A GOR official told ITAR-TASS

that the current position of the Uzbek government on Georgia "is quite balanced and at the same time neutral". In separate statements, Putin and Medvedev praised Uzbekistan as being among Russia's most important partners and a key to Central Asian stability.

Lavrov Heads to Turkey

¶15. (U) Lavrov went to Turkey for a September 2 visit that, according to the MFA, would focus on the "consequences of Georgian's military aggression" and discuss the Turkish proposal to establish a Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. While this visit will not have an impact on the upcoming CSTO meeting, commentators noted that Turkey offered to include Russia in its proposed regional organization when other NATO members were sharply critical of Russian actions in Georgia.

¶16. (U) At the same time, bilateral trade tensions are increasing. Russian customs officials have been delaying the clearance of Turkish trucks at Russia's border, and Turkey's Trade Minister stated August 29 that Turkey would impose similar measures on Russian imports and consider withdrawing its support for Russia's WTO entry. At a joint press conference on September 2, Lavrov and Turkish FM Babacan noted that they had discussed the trade dispute. Lavrov denied that the recent imposition of stricter customs controls on Turkish trucks was politically motivated. Babacan said they had discussed the problem in a sincere and constructed way and noted that it could be overcome with Russia's cooperation and flexibility.

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¶17. (SBU) Comment: The GOR is engaged in a full-court press to enlist support for its decision to recognize the Georgian breakaway regions' independence. By underscoring the scope of its bilateral trade and economic cooperation, Russia is reminding regional partners what is at stake as they balance their proximity to Russia with their desire to deepen relations with the U.S.

BEYRLE